

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## HOLLAND

Report Date: 1983

Associated Regional Report: Connecticut Valley

**Reconnaissance Survey Town Reports**, produced for MHC's Statewide Reconnaissance Survey between 1979 and 1987, introduce the historical development of each of the Commonwealth's municipalities. Each report begins with an historic overview, a description of topography, and political boundaries. For the purposes of the survey, the historic period has been subdivided into seven periods: Contact (1500–1620), Plantation (1620–1675), Colonial (1675–1775), Federal (1775–1830), Early Industrial (1830–1870), Late Industrial (1870–1915), and Early Modern (1915–1940/55). Each report concludes with survey observations that evaluate the town's existing historic properties inventory and highlight significant historic buildings, settlement patterns, and present threats to these resources. A bibliography lists key secondary resources.

Town reports are designed for use together with a series of town maps that demarcate settlement patterns, transportation corridors and industrial sites for each historic period. These maps are in the form of color-coded, polyester overlays to the USGS topographic base map for each town on file and available for consultation at MHC. For further information on the organization and preparation of town reports, readers should contact MHC.

Users should keep in mind that these reports are now two decades or more old. The information they contain, including assessments of existing knowledge, planning recommendations, understanding of local development, and bibliographic references all date to the time they were written. In some cases, information on certain topics was not completed. No attempt has been made to update this information.

Electronic text was not available for digital capture, and as a result most of the reports have been scanned as PDF files. While all have been processed with optical character recognition, there will inevitably be some character recognition errors.

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# MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: January 1983

COMMUNITY: Holland

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## I. TOPOGRAPHY

Holland fell within a region of rugged uplands that dominates most of the eastern portion of the Connecticut River Valley study unit. The uplands average approximately 900 feet in elevation. The landscape's north-south grain was evident in the area's uplands and waterways. The Quinnebaug River Valley extends north-south and bisects these highlands. Water resources were limited to the Quinnebaug River tributaries, two small natural ponds and the Hamilton Reservoir. Limited lowland and upland marsh. A deposit of graphite extends from the Sturbridge/Holland line (site of John Winthrop's plumbago mine) west into Holland. The soil is either sandy or loamy.

## II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Originally included within ten mile radius of Winthrop lead mine grant in 1644 (Tantiusque Deed). Included within the Brimfield annex of 1717 with eastern boundary at Sturbridge line. Southern boundary set at Massachusetts-Connecticut state line in 1714 from an earlier 1642 survey. It was included within the formation of South Brimfield (Wales) in 1762 with its northern boundary at Brimfield line. Established as the independent town of Holland in 1783 with boundary at County Road (Wales).

## III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Small upland town on secondary corridor between Sturbridge and Connecticut, Holland is situated along the upper Quinnebaug valley with drainage from Lake Mashapaug (Connecticut). Potential native sites are suspected around Holland Pond and there is a reported site at Indian Hill on Blodgett Road. Adjacent to the 17th century Winthrop lead mine in Sturbridge along Connecticut Path. Permanent settlement from Brimfield during the mid 18th century with town center on hilltop location above valley. Restricted agricultural potential during the early 19th century limited economic development to small milling activities. The town center retains Federal period and Greek Revival civic buildings in authentic setting with modest houses elsewhere through town. Creation of Hamilton Reservoir in Quinnebaug valley in the Late Industrial period floods prime agricultural land, creating recreational development during the Early Modern period, with summer cottages along the shoreline. Present growth is related to Hamilton Reservoir and access to primary Boston-New York highway corridor from Sturbridge (I-86).

## IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

### A. Transportation Routes

No native trails documented in town histories; however, several probable trail routes appear to have converged on Pequig-

Kesloge (Holland Pond). These include segments of Wales and Alexander Roads as east-west trails and Brimfield-Mashapaug Roads as the main north-south trail from Quinnebaug River to Mashapaug Pond (Connecticut). Secondary east-west trails appear likely as portions of Stafford-Sturbridge Roads and possibly South May Brook Road.

#### B. Settlement Patterns

There were no reported Contact period sites. Documentary, archaeological and environmental evidence suggest period settlement would have concentrated within the fertile Quinnebaug River Valley. A large Woodland period campsite was located on valley bottomland adjacent to the southern shore of Holland Pond, while two unidentified native sites were situated further south on the valley's outer periphery. Smaller hunting camps and burial grounds may have been established on the highlands that overlooked the valley. An undated native burial site was reputedly situated on a hill a short distance south of the junction of Stafford and Marcey Roads.

#### C. Subsistence Patterns

Native horticulture would have been restricted to the Quinnebaug River bottomlands. Freshwater fishing probably occurred on the Quinnebaug River tributaries and the area's natural ponds. Extensive wooded uplands and marsh for hunting and gathering.

#### D. Observations

The area's rugged terrain, limited agricultural land and freshwater sources would have discouraged substantial native settlement. Locally, native settlement probably gravitated to the more attractive and widespread bottomlands and water resources of Brimfield. The Holland native population appear to have been situated on the periphery of a major native settlement node located to the northeast in the Brookfields, reputed seat of the Quabaugs. Regionally, the Quabaugs probably fell within the domain of the Nipmucs, the dominant native group in central Massachusetts at the time of initial English settlement in Massachusetts. There is an excellent potential for extant period sites due to Holland's rural nature. The Quinnebaug River valley should be considered particularly sensitive.

### V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

#### A. Transportation Routes

Native trails remained as local travel routes with primary north-south path as Brimfield-Mashapaug Road from Holland Pond to Lake Mashapaug. Location of Winthrop lead mine in Sturbridge appears to have had little effect on route system.

#### B. Population

There were no figures for the native population. Colonial settlement did not occur until the early eighteenth century.

### C. Settlement Patterns

Native period settlement is poorly documented. One source referred to native wigwams situated near Holland Pond, although no date was provided.

### D. Economic Base

The native population probably maintained their traditional subsistence patterns. However, local natives may have become involved in the fur trade operation established by William Pynchon in Springfield in the late 1630s.

### E. Observations

The limited data suggests this area functioned as a peripheral zone for both the region's native and colonial population. There was little if any threat to colonial incursion on local native lands because of Holland's rugged terrain and the lack of ready access from the settlements situated along the Connecticut River Valley. Future research should attempt to reconstruct the native community that existed during this period.

## VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

### A. Transportation Routes

Establishment of South Brimfield town center created a radial road pattern from the meeting house. The primary north-south route improved as Brimfield-Mashapaug Roads with the major east-west highway as Stafford-Sturbridge Roads. Secondary regional highway laid along western hill crest as South Meadow-Barney-Polly Roads between Brimfield and Stafford, Connecticut (Hyde, Goodhue map 1877).

### B. Population

It is unclear if a post-1675 native population was present in Holland. The only figures for the colonial population date to the end of the period. In 1776, the district of South Brimfield (Holland and Wales) had 850 residents. The majority of Holland's early settlers moved from Springfield and Brimfield. Others were former Woodstock and Union, Connecticut natives. Most of these people were of English, Scottish and Irish descent.

### C. Settlement Patterns

The first settlement reputedly took place in ca.1720 when Joseph Blodgett established a home northwest of "Blodgett's Hill" (probably Rattlesnake Mountain) in ca.1720. However, settlement did not occur until ca.1731 when distribution of a large number of home lots was initiated in Old Brimfield. By the early 1760s, a settlement node had been established in the vicinity of the junction of Stafford, Brimfield and East Brimfield Roads. The town's first meeting house (ca.1765) and burial ground (ca.1763) were erected in this general area. Later settlement is poorly documented, although it appears

that settlement would have continued to concentrate within the fertile Quinnebaug River Valley. The surrounding uplands were only capable of supporting scattered settlement. The mid-1760s witnessed the division of the recently established district of South Brimfield(ca.1763) into east (Holland) and west (Wales) parishes as a result of a drawn-out religious dispute between the district's Baptist and Congregationalist factions. Holland was established as the center of South Brimfield's Congregationalist population, while Wales was the seat of the district's Baptist residents.

#### D. Economic Base

The town's economic base is poorly documented. As with the other portions of Old Brimfield, Holland established itself as a farming community. The vast majority of local crop production and cattle grazing occurred in the river bottomlands and the moderately sloping hills that flanked the valley. Development of an extensive mill industry was hindered by the lack of streams capable of powering such operations. A possible late 18th century brick production operation may have been established in the vicinity of Holland Pond.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: Only one cottage of the period is known to survive. This is a center chimney, five bay plan structure on Brimfield Road at Hisgin Road, dated 1759. While other period survivals are possible, no other structures with evident Colonial characteristics were observed. If they exist, Colonial period structures would be most likely on East Brimfield Road, where a number of cottages of Federal appearance but potentially early construction, were noted.

Institutional: The first meeting house in Holland was constructed in 1764. No building description is recorded in local histories and at some later date the structure was removed to Connecticut.

#### F. Observations

Throughout this period, Holland existed as a rural, isolated hill town situated within the Connecticut River Valley frontier. Holland was highly dependent on the mother town of Springfield, due to its limited economy and its isolated position. However, its proximity to Connecticut suggests additional social and economic ties to its southern neighbor. Exploration of the latter ties is a worthy research topic. Research should also determine what impact the Indian wars of the 18th century had on the settlement. An architectural survey should be undertaken, since currently the town lacks any architectural inventory. Considerable archaeological evidence of the original settlement center should survive when considering the low degree of development in this area.

## VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

### A. Transportation Routes

Local highways remained focused around Holland town center. Improvement of north-south secondary connectors occurred as Marcey and Butterworth Roads across upland crests. Stafford Turnpike from Sturbridge located across the southeast corner in 1814 (I-86).

### B. Population

Holland reached its greatest population, 453, in the years 1820 and 1830, although even in 1890, at 428, it had not been far below that figure. After 1830, the town began a slow, halting decline which lasted until 1930.

### C. Settlement Patterns

Holland town center was maintained as the civic focus with expansion of milling activity along the Quinnebaug River.

### D. Economic Base

Entirely agricultural town with small saw and grist mills established on Quinnebaug tributaries. Some evident relationship to Worcester County industries: scythe and axe making by blacksmith along Browns Brook; one mill also used by Edward Blodgett to grind lead taken from Sturbridge.

Some shoemaking also in evidence with 1803 tannery in southwest part of town.

### E. Architecture

Residential: Limited construction occurred in Holland in the Federal period. Most of the period houses observed were located in the northern half of the town along Brimfield, East Brimfield and Stafford/Sturbridge Roads. These include several center chimney, five bay plan cottages and one double interior chimney plan house. The house, probably built ca. 1825, incorporates some Greek Revival detailing, such as an entrance surround with corner blocks and a triangular end gable light. That house is probably the most stylish residence surviving in the town. Other houses of the period include a center chimney house on Stafford/Sturbridge Road at the town center and some cottages on Mashapaug Road.

Institutional: A second meeting house was built at the town center some time during the period; that structure stood until the present meeting house was built in 1858. Four school districts were established in 1783 (when the town incorporated) with a school built in 1798 and two additional schools constructed in 1800. A Baptist Society was organized in 1816 and in 1820 a church (36x40 feet) was built at the town center; that structure is not known to survive.

Commercial: A hotel was established at the town center at some time during the period, probably ca.1815. The building is not believed to survive.

#### VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

##### A. Transportation Routes

Little improvement of local road system with exception of secondary north-south highway from Holland center as Holland and Union Roads and relocation of Stafford Road along Steven Brook. No railroads were constructed or projected through the area during the period.

##### B. Population

Holland lost a quarter of its population in the Early Industrial period, reaching 344 in 1870. In 1855, eight of the nine immigrants were natives of Ireland.

##### C. Settlement Patterns

Town center was maintained as the civic focus with milling activity located along the Quinnebaug River at Holland Pond.

##### D. Economic Base

Chief manufacturing enterprise was the cotton mill built by Elbridge Gerry Fuller in 1833. The four-story brick mill employed 30 men and women, and a small village known as Fullerville grew up around the mill. But when the mill was struck by lightning, it was not rebuilt. As in Brimfield, some bricks were also manufactured, but even in the Early Industrial period, Holland's economy was almost entirely agricultural.

In 1862 the Hamilton Woolen Company of Southbridge dammed the Quinnebaug River about a mile southeast of Holland Pond, for the company's mills at Southbridge, condemning much good farmland along its banks.

##### E. Architecture

Residential: Limited residential construction occurred in the Early Industrial period. Most houses were built in the northern half of town along Sturbridge/Stafford, Brimfield and East Brimfield Roads and on the minor roads tributary to them. Some houses of the period were noted as well on lower Mashapaug Road. Approximately a half dozen two story structures were observed; of these, almost all adopted the sidehall plan and three bay facades of the Greek Revival. They are all simply detailed and probably date ca.1845-1865. Cottages outnumber houses by a wide margin with some two dozen examples noted. These are, by contrast, almost all center chimney plan structures with five bay wide facades.

Institutional: The present town center acquired much of its architectural character in the Early Industrial period. Two of the institutional buildings at the center date from the period. These are the Town Hall (ca.1860), a two-story Greek Revival/Italianate structure with double entrances on the gable front and the Congregational Church (1858). The church is one of the town's finest structures. It is a two-story Greek Revival building with a Doric portico in antis. The facade is surmounted by a three-stage steeple consisting of two square bases and a spire. It appears to have been closely modelled on the Brimfield Congregational Church, built 10 years earlier, which has the same Doric portico and three-stage steeple. The Baptist Society, which had been founded in 1817, was defunct by 1848.

#### IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

##### A. Transportation Routes

Highway system remained in place from the Early Industrial period. The flooding of the Hamilton Reservoir in 1866 required relocation of north-south highways, especially Mashapaug Road to the Connecticut line. No trolley routes were constructed through the area.

##### B. Population

Holland lost half of its population in the period 1870-1915, with the greatest losses occurring in the 1880s. By 1915 the population stood at 159. In 1905, the largest immigrant group were six natives of Norway.

##### C. Settlement Patterns

Holland center remained the civic focus with the decline of milling activity around Holland Pond. Flooding of Hamilton Reservoir forced abandonment of agriculture along the Mashapaug valley.

##### D. Economic Base

Holland was an entirely agricultural town. In 1875 the only manufacturing industries noted were four sawmills whose total product value amounted to \$1,459. In terms of product value, this made Holland the smallest, least industrial of the twenty-one towns of Hampden County. By 1890, only two sawmills and a grist mill were in operation in town, while Alvin Goodell made baskets.

##### E. Architecture

Residential: Almost no residential construction occurred in the town until after 1900, when the Hamilton Reservoir area began to experience resort development. The only evidence of late 19th century construction are a few vernacular Queen Anne cottages



with gable roofs and gable dormers on Stafford and Mashapaug Roads. After 1900, Hamilton Reservoir began to develop as a resort area. It is probable that a small percentage of the cottages now occupying much of the shoreline date from the period 1900-1915. These are almost all one-story, frame summer houses with gable or hip roofs and the simplest Colonial Revival or Craftsman details (turned porch posts, exposed rafters, overhanging eaves).

Institutional: Only one institutional building is known for the period. That is the Holland Public Library (1912) on Stafford/Sturbridge Road. The building is a simple but well detailed Colonial Revival design, one story tall with a projecting gable roofed porch on the gable end.

## X, EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

### A. Transportation Routes

Local highways improved as autoroutes with the primary north-south highway as Holland-Mashapaug Roads. Important regional highway corridor between Worcester and Hartford improved as State Route 15 (I-86) through the southeast corner along the line of the Stafford Turnpike.

### B. Population

Holland's population continued to decline until 1930 when it reached its nadir of 137 persons. After 1930 its rise was relatively rapid, and by 1940 it had risen 80% in the decade to 247.

### C. Settlement Patterns

Town center remained as the local civic center with extensive development of summer resort homes around Hamilton Reservoir after the First World War.

### D. Economic Base

No new industries identified. The town remained entirely agricultural.

### E. Architecture

Residential: Extensive development of much of the shoreline of Hamilton Reservoir took place in the period 1915-1930. Minor resort development occurred in the period around Holland Pond. Modest summer cottages were built in substantial numbers during that period. Most of these are very simple one-story structures finished with shingles, clapboards or grooved "novelty siding." A few cottages incorporate masonry details, such as exterior brick or stone chimneys, or masonry porches. Most feature only the simplest Craftsman-derived details such as deep eaves, exposed rafters or rustic verandas. Almost all cottages employ either the gable or hip roof form. Only one cottage of outstanding

design was noted. This is a cobblestone cottage, one-and-a-half stories tall, with a center entrance plan and end exterior chimney, located on lower Mashapaug Road. Other modest Colonial Revival cottages for year-round occupation were observed on Stafford/Sturbridge Road.

Institutional: Only one institutional structure of the period was noted. This is the frame Colonial Revival Holland Elementary School (ca.1930) at the town center. The school is composed of several one-and-a-half story hip roofed elements which may indicate several builds over a period of some 20 years: the sections now comprising the facade appear to date ca.1930, but the existence of a secondary hip-roofed block to the rear could suggest an earlier structure built up to 20 years earlier. To the rear is a two-story masonry addition probably built ca.1960. The 1930 sections incorporate modest Colonial Revival/Moderne details, such as a projecting gable roofed entry with a sunburst fan in the gable.

#### XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

Holland at present has no building inventory. Future survey priorities would include inventory of town center buildings as well as residential/agricultural areas in the northern half of the town. Area forms noting 20th century development of Hamilton Reservoir should be completed as well. Potential National Register district at the town center, with possible individual listing of the 1858 Congregational Church and of Federal/Greek Revival farmhouse, East Brimfield Road.

#### XII. SOURCES

Hyde, Charles M., Historical Celebration of Brimfield (Springfield, 1879).

Lovering, Martin, History of the Town of Holland, Massachusetts (Rutland, Vermont, 1915).